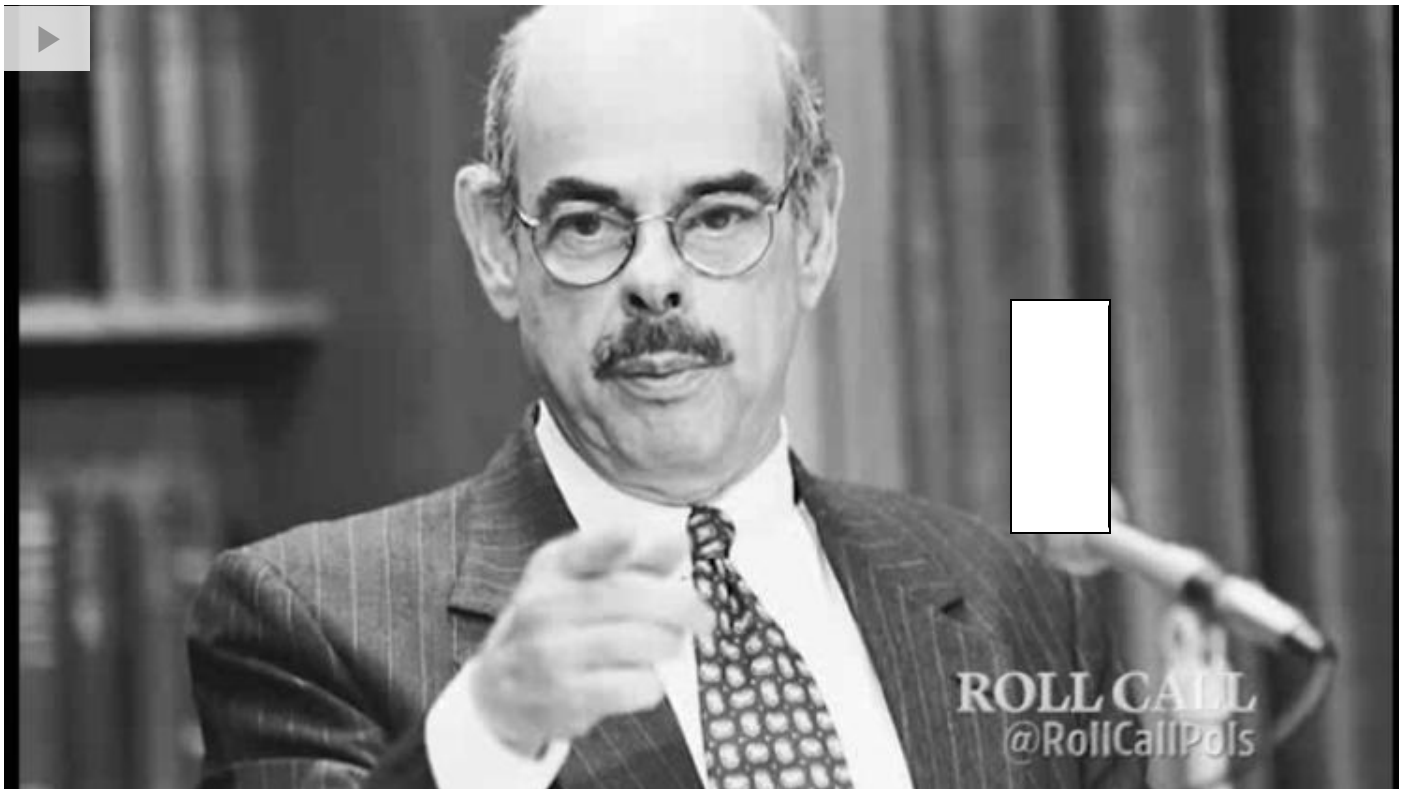


Rep. Henry Waxman to retire from Congress



Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Beverly Hills) announced Thursday that he would not seek a 21st term in the U.S. House. In a statement, Waxman, 74, said it was simply his time to go.

By **RICHARD SIMON**

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WASHINGTON — Rep. Henry A. Waxman, whose legislative record has made him one of the country's most influential liberal lawmakers for four decades, announced Thursday that he will retire from his Westside seat, the latest in a wave of departures that is remaking the state's long-stable congressional delegation.

During a congressional career that began when Gerald R. Ford was president, Waxman became one of the Democratic Party's most prolific and savvy legislators, focusing on issues related to healthcare and the environment. He played a central role — sometimes over opposition within his own party — in passing laws that dramatically cut air pollution, helped reduce smoking, expanded Medicaid coverage for the poor, reduced pesticides in food, made generic drugs more widely available, helped AIDS patients, promoted the development of drugs for rare diseases and improved federal regulation of nursing homes.

Among his legislative victories was the 2010 Affordable Care Act, which he helped write and push

through the House. Passage of the law fulfilled “one of my lifelong dreams” by guaranteeing access to healthcare coverage for Americans, he said.

Often assailed by Republicans for his partisanship, Waxman has been equally lauded by Democrats for his skill at finding legislative compromises that have pushed a host of landmark bills into law. Bald, mustachioed and 5-foot-5, he is also known as a tough political infighter who has not hesitated to push aside rivals who stood in the way of what he considered important goals. The walls of his Capitol Hill office are covered with framed copies of bills he authored and pens used by Democratic and Republican presidents to sign into law numerous measures, any one of which might have been considered a capstone by other lawmakers.

PHOTOS: Politics in 2014

During the George W. Bush administration, Waxman established a reputation as an investigatory pit pull, staging high-profile hearings that drew headlines as well as protests from administration officials.

His California colleague, Rep. George Miller (D-Martinez), who announced his own retirement earlier this month, once quipped to a Washington political journal that he thought Waxman’s first name was “sonuvabitch, because everyone ... kept asking, ‘Do you know what that sonuvabitch Waxman wants now?’ ”

His highest-profile hearing came in 1994, when he summoned the heads of the nation’s tobacco companies to a televised session on the dangers of smoking. The public testimony by the chief executives, in which they claimed not to believe cigarettes were addictive, became a “turning point in our national history,” Waxman later wrote in a book with Joshua Green, “The Waxman Report: How Congress Really Works.”

Fifteen years later, President Obama, who has had his own struggles to quit smoking, cited the hearing in signing legislation cosponsored by Waxman that gave the federal government new authority to regulate tobacco.

Waxman’s retirement likely will set off a scramble of politicians seeking to represent his heavily Democratic 33rd District. In addition to being a relatively safe seat, its many wealthy, politically active residents make the district, which runs from Beverly Hills and Malibu down the coast to the Palos Verdes Peninsula, one of country’s leading sources of campaign contributions. The ability to steer those donations to fellow lawmakers offers a path to power in the House that Waxman employed actively early in his career and that others will certainly covet.

Two political independents already had announced plans to challenge Waxman this year, but Democratic candidates who would not have run against the incumbent are now likely to enter the

race.

In an interview, Waxman, 74, said he had decided, simply, that the time had come to do something else.

“At the end of this year, I would have been in Congress for 40 years,” he said. “If there is a time for me to move on to another chapter in my life, I think this is the time to do it.

“I have run my last campaign,” he said.

Waxman’s departure will significantly weaken California’s clout on Capitol Hill, where seniority still matters. He is the House’s sixth-most senior member and the fourth veteran California congressman to head for the exits this year. Along with Miller he was the last of the huge class of Democrats elected in the post-Watergate election of 1974 who are still serving in the House.

On the Republican side, Reps. Howard “Buck” McKeon of Santa Clarita, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and John Campbell of Irvine have also announced plans to leave.

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A combination of factors — advancing age, Congress’ sorry image, hyper-partisanship, and political burnout — have contributed to the wave of congressional retirements.

But Waxman said that while “there are elements of Congress today that I do not like,” he was still enjoying the job. In a written statement to be **posted on his official website**, he added, “I still feel youthful and energetic, but I recognize if I want to experience a life outside of Congress, I need to start soon. Public office is not the only way to serve, and I want to explore other avenues while I still can.”

He expressed confidence that he would have won reelection had he run again — something most political handicappers agree on — but lamented the amount of time that he would spend campaigning and fundraising.

In 2012, Waxman survived an \$8-million challenge from a deep-pocketed independent candidate in a newly drawn district that brought him his first real contest in years. He won with 54% of the vote.

Waxman’s career in elected office began in 1968 when, at age 29, he won a seat in the California Assembly. The son of ardent, New Deal Democrats, he was elected when Ronald Reagan was governor and the Rams still played in the Los Angeles Coliseum. When Waxman first arrived on Capitol Hill, Edmund G. Brown Jr. was preparing to take the oath of office as governor — for the first time.

Along with his friend and fellow lawmaker Howard Berman, who lost his congressional seat in a primary last year, Waxman forged a politically influential partnership in the Legislature, often referred to as the Berman-Waxman machine, that reshaped the state's Democratic party. Then, after six years in Sacramento, he moved to Washington.

"I hoped to be able to serve 20 years and leave a mark on some important issues," he said in his statement Thursday.

"I never imagined I would be in the House for 40 years and be able to advance every issue I care deeply about. But in what feels like a blink of an eye, it has been 40 years, and I've devoted most of my life to the House of Representatives."

Along the way, Waxman developed a reputation for shrewdness and legislative skill. He once thwarted an effort to weaken clean-air rules by offering 600 amendments, which he wheeled into a committee room in a shopping cart.

He was also known for a willingness to elbow rivals out of his way. Early on, he won a key subcommittee chairmanship with jurisdiction over health laws, pushing a more senior lawmaker aside with the help of Democrats for whom he had raised campaign funds. Then, in 2008, with a Democrat in the White House and a long-sought national health insurance law within reach, Waxman took the chairmanship of the House Energy and Commerce Committee away from veteran Rep. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.), the chamber's longest serving Democrat.

Waxman and Dingell, who represents a Detroit-area district heavy with automakers, had long fought over clean-air legislation, but in this battle, advocates of health reform pointed to Dingell's age, saying he lacked the stamina for what was certain to be a long and complex fight.

In the Democratic caucus that decided on the chairmanship, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) delivered a speech illustrating the breadth of Waxman's legislative achievements.

Holding up a bag of potato chips, Schakowsky said, "There is a nutrition label on the bag that we all know and take for granted. Henry Waxman wrote the law that puts these labels on the bag."

Lifting a bottle of pills, she said, "Henry Waxman wrote the law that created the generic drug industry." Then displaying an apple, she said, "Henry Waxman wrote the law that removed dangerous pesticide from apples and other foods."

In his statement, Waxman said that while he has been frustrated at times, "I am not leaving out of frustration with Congress. Even in today's environment, there are opportunities to make real progress."

Still, he complained about the “extremism of the tea party Republicans,” and said he was “embarrassed that the greatest legislative body in the world too often operates in a partisan intellectual vacuum, denying science, refusing to listen to experts and ignoring facts,” an apparent reference to, among other things, his difficulty in getting climate-change legislation to the president's desk.

Waxman said he hasn't decided on his plans after Congress.

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